

A VALUES AUDIT AS IT RELATES TO PLANNING TOWARDS CONSOLIDATION

EXECUTIVE PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

As times change and political climates dictate fiscal responsibility, it becomes apparent that the fire service has to develop a strategic plan to try and utilize more efficiently the resources available. This was a concern studied by the City of DeWitt and the Charter Township of DeWitt. A concept that was considered was a fire authority.

The purpose of this research paper was to conduct a values audit and compare the core values held by both fire departments that were considering forming this fire authority. This procedure (values audit) is one of the steps in strategic planning using an applied strategic planning model. The methodologies used in this paper were descriptive and evaluative.

To answer the following questions a questionnaire was used and current literature was reviewed: 1) Do the DeWitt City Fire Department and the DeWitt Township Fire Department have similar core values? 2) Is it important that merging Fire Departments have the same core values? 3) Can fire departments with different values become one, homogenous, and work together?

The procedure followed for this project was to review literature related to a values audit and determine a relationship to the fire service. To determine individual and organizational values a questionnaire was administered to the personnel of both fire departments. This data was then analyzed.

The results of this questionnaire appear to indicate a strong similarity in values between the two fire departments. Respondents also indicated that these two departments, whether they have similar core values or not, could consolidate as one department.

It is recommended that a synopsis of this project be presented to the Ad Hoc Committee that is discussing this possible merger. This would provide them with additional information in which to make a recommendation, whether to merge or not to merge.

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INTRODUCTION

For many years, DeWitt Township has had the City of DeWitt provide fire and medical services to five square miles of the township. This has been done under a contract. The DeWitt area is a growing community of 32 square miles and a population of approximately 12,000. Within the Township is the City of DeWitt. Both the Township and the City have their own fire department. Recently discussion began in regards to combining the departments under one authority. This was initiated to find a cost effective way to supply emergency services to both municipalities.

The problem was how to combine the resources of both communities to make an effective and efficient department. One aspect of this process is the personnel involved in this merger, the firefighters.

The purpose of this research paper was to compare and analyze the values of both departments by conducting a values audit. Conducting this audit should provide information in regards to compatibility in department philosophy through its values. A values audit is important to any strategic plan especially when potentially merging two fire departments.

The research methodology used to study this issue was descriptive and evaluative. Literature on values was reviewed and a questionnaire was administered to both fire departments. The questions to be answered by this research were as follows:

- 1) Do the DeWitt City Fire Department and the DeWitt Township Fire Department have similar core values?
- 2) Is it important that merging fire departments have the same core values?
- 3) Can fire departments with different values become one, homogenous, and work together?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The history of the DeWitt Township and DeWitt City Fire Departments goes back over 30 years. At one time the City of DeWitt provided fire protection to all of DeWitt Township. A dispute arose in the early 60's which caused the Township to form their own fire department. The City of DeWitt is located in the northwest corner of the Township and was surrounded at that time by rural agricultural land. The main population and development of the Township was in the southern section of the Township. This area borders the City of Lansing. Because of the density of the area, this is where the Township built its new fire station.

Over time, the rural area around the City of DeWitt began to develop. This development has created many subdivisions and a municipal water system, which has helped to create more development. Development naturally requires services to be provided. Since the Township fire station was in the southern area of the Township and the development was in the northwest area, DeWitt Township began a contract relationship with the City of DeWitt to provide fire and medical first response services to the northwest quadrant of the township . This contract area encompasses approximately five square miles.

The Township continued to grow in both commercial and residential development. To prepare the department for this growth, the Township hired its first full-time Fire Administrator in 1994. Up to that time the department was completely volunteer paid-on-call. The City of DeWitt Fire Department is also a paid-on-call department. They provide service to the City of DeWitt as well as provide services, by contract, with four townships.

There is still limited growth in the southern part of the Township, but the bulk of the growth is in the northwest quarter of the Township. This growth naturally has

increased the burden on the contract services provided by the City of Dewitt. In recent years, when the contract came up for renewal, a battle had ensued in regards as to what the contract fees should be. The City feels the Township is not paying enough and of course the Township disagrees.

It has been suggested that the Township could build a substation in the contract area and provide fire and medical services at the same cost that is paid for contracted services. Tax dollars would stay with its own department instead of supporting another department. The Township is planning to build a new Township Hall in the contract area. With the proposed Township Hall construction, it is even more appealing to have a fire station attached, thus saving on building costs.

The cost of services, building a new fire station, and political concerns has brought the two communities together. An Ad Hoc Committee was formed by the two communities to study the issue of consolidation and ways to keep costs down. Whether consolidation will be the answer, the jury is still out. Consolidation could delay the need to build a substation and could combine financial resources for large capital expenditures such as apparatus.

To make all of this work, the people impacted have to be in favor of this merger. If not, it will be doomed. All parties have been informed of the progress and direction of the meetings between the City and Township.

As can be seen by the potential complexity of this issue a plan will need to be developed. This coincides with Module 4, Strategic Planning, of the Executive Planning course offered in the Executive Fire Officer program. While a strategic planning model has many parts, this paper will focus on the values audit. This audit may help both parties with their decision in regards to whether the personnel can work together. The City has concerns that the make up and structure of the two departments are too

different to merge cohesively. This values audit may answer their concerns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to gather information related to a values audit. It was important to study this aspect of strategic planning to help understand the process necessary to consolidate two fire departments. The values of an organization and its members is an important factor to consider when planning to merge two organizations.

Goodstein, Nolan & Pfeiffer state that there are four elements to the process of a values audit in strategic planning. "They are 1) The values audit itself; 2) The examination of the organization's operating philosophy; 3) An analysis of the organization's culture; and 4) A stakeholder analysis." (Goodstein, Nolan, Pfeiffer, 1986, pg. 54)

Since this paper is focusing on the values audit, that is the main element that is being studied. A values audit should start on an individual level with key decision makers and others that are involved in the planning process. Once the decision makers have identified their personal values, then the focus is placed on the organizations values. Basically, what is trying to be determined is the values that are the driving forces behind organizational decisions. These values give the organization purpose and direction. They are a guiding force for the organizations future direction.

There are several methods for assessing individual values. They range from one-on-one interviews to various types of activities to group interviews. A questionnaire was used for this values audit. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Whether developing a mission statement, vision statement or determining the

feasibility of merging two fire departments as one, it is important to assess values. "When we leave home and cross our nation's boundaries, moral clarity often blurs. Without a backdrop of shared attitudes, and without familiar laws and judicial procedures that define standards of ethical conduct, certainty is elusive." (Donaldson, 1996, pg. 48) This same concept can be compared to fire departments as well as nations. When two separate departments consider merging as one, it is like leaving home to form a new nation. To form this nation it is important to learn and understand our shared and conflicting values or attitudes. If this is not done, a plan to merge may be elusive and doomed to failure. Evaluation of the values can help fire departments and public officials determine if it is worth investing resources to make this merger happen. Conflicting values, along with cultural differences, will need to be resolved prior to blending as one. Fire department officers as well as other personnel may feel threatened and will want to know whose values will prevail. By identifying those differences in values, both entities can work toward a common denominator.

What works for one department may not work in the other, if values differ. How these issues are resolved can be the determining factor in consolidation and merger. A values audit can have an impact on the assumptions the fire department leaders may have. It may show that the departments are closer in thought than they believed.

Whether we are shaping or guiding ethical behavior in business or fire departments, we "must be guided by three principles.

- ☐ Respect for core human values, which determine the absolute moral threshold for all business activities.
- ☐ Respect for local traditions.
- ☐ The belief that context matters when deciding what is right and what is

wrong." (Donaldson, 1996, pg. 52)

To interpret this for the fire department we need to understand that all members may have differing core values, depending on their upbringing, along with the social impacts of their time. This aids in understanding why we do what we do. Since two different fire departments are being studied, there may be differing traditions. For example DeWitt City has personnel who live in the City. This city is small and members are more like a family. They have a community identity and participate in many community functions. DeWitt Township personnel come from a larger geographic area and are not tied to a specific identity. Working through the identities and traditions can prove challenging, especially if you feel you are losing your identity. Deciding what is right or what is wrong for both departments can be viewed as what is right for both departments, and looking at what is wrong to determine how it can be turned into a right. The main thing is to understand and respect each others values and traditions and work to meld them together.

"The reason for identifying important organizational values is that such values directly influence how people behave. These values determine the organizational culture, which is, perhaps, the most powerful internal force affecting any organization." (Ross, 1995, pg. 102)

An ethical definition of core values is: "respect for human dignity, respect for basic rights and good citizenship." (Donaldson, 1996, pg. 54) Respect for human dignity refers to recognizing a persons value as a human being not as a tool for the departments benefit. While DeWitt City and DeWitt Township may have different values or rights, both communities must respect those rights. Good citizenship can be translated into having both departments work together for the betterment and benefit of the community.

"Companies that enjoy enduring success have core values and a core purpose

that remains fixed while their business strategies and practices endlessly adapt to a changing world." (Colleens, Porras, 1996, pg. 65) This comment can pertain to the fire services as well. While fire departments may have differing values in general, they will probably have similar core values and a core purpose. This core purpose is to protect life and property. These core values and core purpose can be the contributing factors to aid in merging two fire departments into one. This merger can succeed with positive change and a reenergizing of these core values and core purpose.

Fire departments have been in existence for decades. Throughout this time many changes have occurred through innovation, technology, and management styles. But the character of the organization is defined by its core ideology. "Core ideology defines the enduring character of an organization-a consistent identity that transcends product or market life cycles, technological breakthroughs, management fads, and individual leaders." (Collins, Porras, 1996, pg. 66) Some prominent business leaders

"understand that it is more important to know who you are and where you are going, for where you are going will change as the world around you changes. Leaders die, products become obsolete, markets change, new technologies emerge, and management fads come and go, but core ideology in a great company endures as a source of guidance and inspiration." (Collins, Porras, 1996, pg. 66)

This is the same with fire departments. Political leaders change, fire department officers as well as personnel change, communities change, and services expected by the public changes. If the department is to keep pace and endure, it must have a core ideology.

We talk about core ideology guiding an organization, but what makes up this ideology? It is made up of core values which are guiding principles and the core purpose which is the organizations reason for existence. Core values define what an

organizations stands for. An organization that lives by its values will stand by those values whether its advantageous or disadvantageous. "The key is not what core values an organization has but that it has core values at all." (Collins, Porras, 1996, pg. 67) This is also true in the fire service. For example much of the fire service is steeped in tradition. Tradition is mankind's way to demonstrate the unity that comes with shared core values. If a group comes in not believing in tradition this could create major conflict. Therefore, it is important to know an organization's core values and philosophy. When developing a strategy, such as for consolidation, it is important to understand the philosophy and core values of each party. This may be a difficult and time consuming venture but, if this is not done, strategies that are adopted may fail. This failure is caused by the conflict with core values and philosophy of the parties involved.

Each organization wants to maintain its integrity. "if an organization can be clear about its philosophy and core values, it will be able to say no more easily to any proposals or actions that are likely to damage its integrity and yes to those that maintain or enhance its integrity." (Bryson, 1988, pg. 108)

Since we are talking about two organizations merging, it is important to reemphasize that the organization's values and strategic plan must be congruent. If it is not, the result will be similar to the acquisition of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company by the American Express Corporation. "Fireman's Fund was committed to strong humanistic values in dealing with its employees and had one of the most comprehensive HRD programs available, whereas American Express was much more traditional in employee relations and had little in the way of HRD programs". (Goodstein, Nolan, Pfeiffer, 1986, pg. 53) The difference of the two cultures eventually led American Express Company to divest itself of Fireman's Fund. While this merger made sense at the time, because the values of each company were not checked or

evaluated, it was doomed. The same can be said for the merger of the DeWitt Township and DeWitt City Fire Departments. If the values of each are not known, it too could be doomed. "The failure to check out the differences in values between the two organizations and to take appropriate plans to manage those differences was an important reason for the difficulties that were encountered." (Pheiffer, Goodstein, Nolan, 1989, pg. 96)

In review, a values audit is not a simple task. For organizations and individuals of those organizations, a comprehensive evaluation must be conducted. By conducting this audit, all persons involved will be able to more clearly understand why their organization exists and its future direction. Without understanding, these departments will not have a smooth and functioning consolidation.

PROCEDURES

Population

In order to determine the values of the two fire departments a questionnaire was administered to both departments. The population consisted of the following:

12 firefighters and officers from the City of DeWitt Fire Department;

15 firefighters and officers from the DeWitt Township Fire Department.

All of the people involved in filling out this questionnaire are volunteer paid-on-call personnel.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire used had five parts and was personally administered by the author to each department at its regular business meeting. The respondents were asked

to give their view of their organization's values and how values relate to other fire departments. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collected

A total of 27 questionnaires were administered and returned, 12 from the City of DeWitt and 15 from DeWitt Township. These questionnaires were then recorded separating the responses from both departments. This was done to compare responses.

Assumptions and Limitations

Even though there were some personnel who do not want to merge, it was assumed that all respondents would respond honestly. The author had hoped to obtain a greater response to the questionnaire but, due to various commitments not all personnel attended the meetings. Still a large sample did respond and they represented the range from new hires to those with over 20 years on the department.

RESULTS

The results from the questionnaire indicate that both departments hold the same overall values. This information was determined from question 1 on the questionnaire.

The responses were as follows:

Question 1 asked the respondents to place a check mark by each item that they felt was a department value. The following table lists the value and the percentage of respondents from each department that checked that value.

DeWitt City	Value	DeWitt Township
91.7%	Team Work	100%
58.3	Competence	66.7
27.2	Risk-Taking	13.3
0	Advocacy	6.6
16.7	Harmony	33.3
66.7	Trust	80
83.3	Tradition	46.7
25	Creativity	46.7
16.7	Freedom	20
75	Quality	53.3
41.7	Security	60
8.3	Valor	40
41.7	Vision	40
91.7	Service	73.3
58.3	Integrity	60
0	Conflict	0
41.7	Efficiency	66.7
DeWitt City	Value	DeWitt Township
66.7%	Education	93.3%
66.7	Honesty	66.7
50	Cautious	40
33.3	Initiative	60
63.7	Growth	66.7
75	Openness	33.3
50	Opportunity	60
83.3	Pride	73.3

66.7	Loyalty	66.7
75	Fairness	53.3
66.7	Competence	53.3
50	Accountability	60
75	A Social Atmosphere	40
50	Personal Sacrifice	33.3
75	A Chain Of Command	73.3
33.3	Clearly Defined Goals	40
41.7	Proficiency In Skills	66.7
33.3	Conflict Resolution	26.7
83.3	Good Public Relations	86.7
50	Open Communications	53.3
16.7	Out-Spokenness	13.3
83.3	Personal Safety	86.7
33.3	Confidentiality	46.7
66.7	It's Employees	60

Table 1

Question 2 asked the respondents to indicate which of the listed values they felt their department valued the most and least? Table 2 and 3 indicates their respective responses.

DeWitt City Value	% of Responses	DeWitt Twp. Value	% of Responses
Tradition	33.3	Teamwork	33.3
Teamwork	25	Personal Safety	20
Public Relations	16.7	Education	13.3
Service	8.3	Social Atmosphere	6.7
Proficiency in Skills	8.3	Loyalty	6.7
Personal Safety	8.3	Competence	6.7
		Trust	6.7
		Service	6.7

Table 2

Above table indicates the value most valued by fire department as perceived by the respondent.

DeWitt City Value	% of Responses	DeWitt Twp. Value	% of Responses
Risk Taking	25	Conflict	20
Valor	16.7	Risk Taking	13.3
Teamwork	8.3	Creativity	13.3
Conflict	8.3	Valor	6.7
Fairness	8.3	Teamwork	6.7
Vision	8.3	Tradition	6.7
Outspokenness	8.3	Outspokenness	6.7
Freedom	8.3	Pride	6.7
Harmony	8.3	Personal Sacrifice	6.7
		Public Relations	6.7

Table 3

Above table indicates the value least valued by fire department as perceived by the respondent.

Question 3 asked the respondent which one of the values listed they individually valued the most and least. Table 4 and 5 reflect their responses.

Dewitt City Value	% of Responses	DeWitt Twp. Value	% of Responses
Team Work	25	Team Work	26.7
Trust	16.7	Trust	13.3
Competence	16.7	Competence	13.3
Personal Safety	16.7	Pride	13.3
Education	8.3	Education	13.3
Service	8.3	Service	6.7
It's Employees	8.3	Loyalty	6.7
		Personal Safety	6.7

Table 4

Above table indicates the value most valued by the individual as perceived by the respondent.

DeWitt City Value	% of Responses	DeWitt Twp. Value	% of Responses
Risk Taking	8.3	Risk Taking	20
Tradition	8.3	Tradition	13.3
Conflict	8.3	Conflict	13.3
Chain of Command	8.3	Valor	6.7
Trust	8.3	Advocacy	6.7
Growth	8.3	Open Communications	6.7
Security	8.3	Security	6.7
Harmony	8.3	Harmony	6.7
Vision	8.3	Vision	6.7
Social Atmosphere	8.3	Personal sacrifice	6.7
Outspokenness	8.3		
Opportunity	8.3		

Table 5

Above table indicates the value least valued by the individual as perceived by the respondent.

The above tables address the first research question which asked: Do the DeWitt City Fire Department and DeWitt Township Fire Department have similar core values? Question 2 of the questionnaire indicated that the City and Township both valued teamwork as an organizational core value and individual core value.

The second research question asked: Is it important that other fire departments have the same core values? It is important to note that not all respondents answered questions 4 and 5 on the survey. Responses from the City had 8 respond yes and 4 no. The Township had 9 yes and 3 no. The following are the responses to question 4 of the

survey by the city fire department personnel who circled yes:

- We're all doing the same thing.
- Because all departments should be close and work as an efficient team.
- Because these values are what the basis of a fire department is.
- More or less otherwise they will have opposing philosophies as to how to attack common problems.
- Teamwork-both have to work as one.
- So all departments can work together on common ground and get the job done.
- Because a fire department is like a big family so values are important.

The following are the responses to question 4 of the survey by the Township fire department personnel who circled yes:

- So you can work with them.
- That way we will get along better.
- Without those values a department can't function. They become stagnate, don't learn, and don't work well with each other.
- So all departments can work together with no problems.
- So a better merging of work functionality is achieved.
- To get along, work as a team.
- Working together on scenes.

The following are the responses to question 4 of the survey by the City Fire Department personnel who circled no:

- Not all departments function the same or have the same make up of people.
- No two departments are alike.
- Were all different in or own ways.

The following are the responses to question 4 of the survey by the Township Fire Department personnel who circled no:

- Too many variables between departments.
- Not as long as you both can work safely on a fire scene as one unit.
- Departments can still do the job with differing values.
- What may work for one department may not work for another one.
- They may have different criteria dependent upon their own areas.

The third research question asked: Can fire departments with different values become one, homogenous, and work together? The City responded with 8 yes and 3

no and the Township responded with 9 yes and 4 no. The following are the responses

to question 5 of the survey by the City Fire Department personnel who circled yes:

- It all depends on how they work together.
- There is time for change in departments and services.
- Because one department can learn from another.
- If visionary and hard working leaders can bring them together under a mission statement that can be agreed upon by both parties.
- Through team work.
- If that's the way they are used to operating it must work.
- When it comes down to it we all work together as one.
- I feel if they work together and work on the differences they can become homogenous.
- Because one department is of a different makeup does not mean they cannot blend with another.

The following are the responses to question 5 of the survey by the Township Fire Department personnel who circled yes:

- It may be tough to do with other people who don't believe the same as you.
- If they really try.
- Everybody should be able to work together.
- Combine the best of both.
- Personal relationship.
- Departments must have tolerance to differing values.
- They all have a common goal to provide service to their respective community.
- Because of a common goal.
- Through good communication and openness with each other.

The following are the responses to question 5 of the survey by the City Fire Department personnel who circled no:

- One always thinks he is better than the other.
- Not without conflict.

The following are the responses to question 5 of the survey by the Township Fire Department personnel who circled no:

- To great a risk of conflict.
- If they don't believe in the same ideas or values, they will have a tendency to be close-minded and not open to new ideas.
- Each department would still want their own command structure.

- They could share common values to have only one set of goals to try to meet.

The following comment from the Township was not preceded by a yes or no:

- Every department is different, some are the same and have basic values, but in different regions certain things must be different.

According to the respondents it is important that each department have similar core values, yet they also indicated that they can become one even if they do not have similar values.

DISCUSSION

Literature and experience of businesses indicate that organizational values are important to a successful merger. The responses by the fire personnel were a surprise to the author. From conversations with politicians and fire fighters it was assumed that the values of both departments would be radically different. The questionnaire results indicate that many differences are minute.

What struck the author as interesting is that the values most valued by the organization were not valued by the individuals. That value was tradition. When talking with politicians they talk about tradition and how important it is, yet the individuals did not rate it as number one. Both organizations did place teamwork high as an organizational value and number one as an individual value.

The responses from question 4 and 5 on this questionnaire also surprised the author. Even though similar core values are important to the respondents they feel that departments with dissimilar values can merge. This response is just the opposite of verbal responses by the city politicians and fire department officers.

The organizational implications from this research is very positive. If both

departments and politicians were made aware of these results it may alleviate much of the apprehension that seems to be in the air. While this values audit is a positive step there will need to be more done to plan and make a successful merger.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the results of this survey be presented to the Ad Hoc Committee that has been considering the merger. The answers presented to the research questions can shed some insight and other perspectives in regards to this issue of merging by forming a Fire Authority.

Research questions 2 and 3 dealt with department core value compatibility and if the organizations could become one. The written answers would certainly indicate a merger is possible. This information should be presented to the Ad Hoc Committee. When presented it should lay out the purpose of the study, the results of the study, and be presented in a positive format, not indicating what comments came from what department, but as common factors to achieve a productive Fire Authority.

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APPENDIX A

NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT SURVEY

A VALUES AUDIT OF THE DEWITT CITY AND DEWITT TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT

Core values are the essential and enduring principles of an organization. To some extent, individual values represent the values held by an organization. Values shared by the organization's members define who they are, what they do, and what principles they stand for. Values affect the behavior of its members in all aspects of their lives. Understanding real and/or perceived values is important to understanding where an organization stands and where it may be heading. This survey is to compare the values of two separate fire departments and to determine common values.

Please indicate your responses to the following items. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Place a check (✓) mark by each item that you feel your Department values:

<input type="checkbox"/> Team work	<input type="checkbox"/> Service	<input type="checkbox"/> Competence
<input type="checkbox"/> Competence	<input type="checkbox"/> Integrity	<input type="checkbox"/> Accountability
<input type="checkbox"/> Risk-taking	<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict	<input type="checkbox"/> A social atmosphere
<input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Efficiency	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal sacrifice
<input type="checkbox"/> Harmony	<input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty	<input type="checkbox"/> A chain of command
<input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Clearly defined goals
<input type="checkbox"/> Trust	<input type="checkbox"/> Honesty	<input type="checkbox"/> Proficiency in skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Tradition	<input type="checkbox"/> Cautious	<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict resolution
<input type="checkbox"/> Creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> Initiative	<input type="checkbox"/> Good public relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Freedom	<input type="checkbox"/> Growth	<input type="checkbox"/> Open communications
<input type="checkbox"/> Quality	<input type="checkbox"/> Openness	<input type="checkbox"/> Out-spokenness
<input type="checkbox"/> Security	<input type="checkbox"/> Opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal safety
<input type="checkbox"/> Valor	<input type="checkbox"/> Pride	<input type="checkbox"/> Confidentiality
<input type="checkbox"/> Vision	<input type="checkbox"/> Fairness	<input type="checkbox"/> It's employees

2. Which one of the above items do you feel your Department places

the most value? _____

the least value? _____

3. Which one of the above items do you place

the most value? _____

the least value? _____

4. Is it important that other fire departments have the same values?

Yes/No Why or why not? _____
(circle one)

5. Can fire departments with different values become homogenous (as one)?

Yes/No Why or why not? _____
(circle one)
